Phonologist, Africanist, Typologist:

George N. (Nick) Clements: (October 5, 1940 – August 30, 2009)

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On last August 30, linguistic typology lost a great colleague and a good friend, Nick Clements. Although known primarily as a theoretical phonologist and Africanist, Nick's linguistic concerns were the same as many typologists, as he strove both to establish language universals and to characterize exactly how languages could differ from one another. On the way he put several major grammatical and phonological phenomena on the map and elevated others up to new heights. The five books and nearly 100 articles published during his career established Nick Clements as a unique scholar whose innovative approach to formal description and comparison resulted in deep and insightful studies which will continue to impact generations of scholars.

Nick Clements received his PhD in linguistics in 1973 from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. His dissertation, "The verbal syntax of Ewe", was just the first of several grammatical studies, in which he offered insightful formal interpretations of typologically significant phenomena, e.g. gerundive nominalization and verb serialization (cf. Clements 1975a), each time enlarging the scope of coverage to address new and deeper questions. Two further influential studies drawing from Ewe were his thorough-going investigation into logophoricity (Clements 1975b), and his ground-breaking study of the syntax-phonology interface (Clements 1978). Turning his attention to East African Bantu, Clements' (1984a) rigorous work on binding domains and the focus marker *ni* in Kikuyu extended our understanding of the scope of focus marking in African languages and in general.

While Nick's last syntactic publication dates from over 25 years ago, his extensive phonological contributions start in the mid 1970s and continue to the end of his life. Work on West African vowel harmony systems (Clements 1974, 1977, 1981), as well on Turkish (Clements & Sezer 1982), not only helped establish the framework of autosegmental phonology, but also increased our awareness of the complexities. He would continue this interest in later developing a multilinear framework to do capture the properties and relationship between the ATR vowel harmony systems known primarily from West Africa and the vowel-height harmony systems further East in Bantu (Clements 1991, 1993).

Also from this period is Nick's extensive work on tone. Besides the aforementioned seminal work on the syntax-phonology interface (Clements 1978), which dealt with tone in Ewe, Clements & Ford (1979) and Clements (1984b) provide deep insights into the analysis of tone, with Kikuyu representing the extraordinary morphotonemic complexities found in Bantu languages. Nick rightly took a lot of pride in the important Clements & Goldsmith (1984) volume whose co-authored introduction laid out the basic issues in Bantu tonology. As Clements & Ford were developing their autosegmental analysis of (high tone) downstep as a non-linked low tone wedged between two linked high tones, Clements (1979) presented his first theory of tonal downstep, which he would follow up with a multitiered analysis of multiple tone heights and downstep (Clements 1983).

While the above achievements would alone have established Nick as one of the foremost phonologists and Africanists in the world, his interest in universals and typology took him well beyond. In the 1980s and early 1990s Nick was at the center of two additional issues of longstanding interest in phonology: the syllable and distinctive features. In Clements & Keyser (1983), a concise and lucid monograph, the authors develop a "flat" theory of the syllable lacking the familiar onset-rime distinction, and a universal CV tier to account for syllabicity, vowel and consonant length, and quantity. It was in this work that we see clearly the desire to capture typological generalizations such as the preference for CV syllables. Subsequent singly-authored research would deal further with syllabification and establish his famous "sonority cycle" (Clements 1992b). His much-cited accounts of compensatory lengthening in Luganda (Clements 1986a) and Barra Gaelic syllabification (Clements 1986b) drew heavily from his insights concerning both syllables and syllabification.

Having been largely responsible for the development of feature geometry in non-linear phonology (Clements 1985; see also Clements & Hume 1995), it would be his second interest, features, which unified the last twenty years of his research. The following succinct summary of his views on features can be found on his website under "Feature Theory" (cf. Clements 2003a):

- Features are *universal* in the sense that all languages define their speech sounds in terms of a small feature set
- Features are *distinctive* in that they commonly distinguish one phoneme from another
- Features *delimit* the number of theoretically possible speech sound contrasts within and across languages
- Features are *economical* in allowing relatively large phoneme systems to be defined in terms of a much smaller feature set
- Features define *natural classes* of sounds observed in recurrent phonological patterns.
- Patterns of *markedness*, underlying crosslinguistic universals, involve the distinction between marked and unmarked features

(http://nickclements.free.fr/featuretheory.html)

Here also we see Nick Clements' typological interest: No language invokes all features phonologically, nor do they necessarily invoke the same features, despite universal tendencies. His notion of "representational economy" is crucial: "... features are specified in a given language only to the extent that they are needed in order to express generalizations about the phonological system" (Clements 2001:2). Despite his phonetic commitment and expertise, what he is saying here is that the analysis of a language is not done on the basis of a priori universal considerations but rather on basis of which features are "activated", i.e. needed to capture phonological generalizations in individual languages.

Reading the above on features makes one think of Trubetzkoy or Jakobson. Like them, Clements is at once the theoretician, the universalist, and the typologist. He is also fully committed to instrumental phonetic validation of phonological claims. Nick participated both in the Laboratory Phonology meetings, e.g. LabPhon 1 (Clements 1990a,b), LabPhon 2 (Clements 1992a,b) and Labphon 7 (Clements & Osu 2002), as well as the International Congress of Phonetic Sciences: ICPhS 13 (Clements 1995, Clements & Laniran 1995, Clements, Hertz & Lauret 1995) and

ICPhS 15 (Clements 2003b,c). In these and other works Nick skillfully combined an unusual mastery of both phonetics and phonology to achieve quite new results, e.g. concerning implosive and explosive consonants in Ikwerre (Clements & Osu 2002), downstep and tone production in Yoruba (Laniran & Clements 2003), nasality in Ikwerre (Clements & Osu 2003, 2005). These last studies as well as his joint work with his wife and linguist, Annie Rialland, make clear that he never lost his attachment to Africa. Clements & Rialland (2008), a part of which was presented at the ALT7 Paris workshop on "The Typology of African Languages", Sept. 24-25, 2007, provides a division of Africa into six "phonological zones" and a comprehensive areal analysis of phonological features for the whole continent.

On his website his current projects are listed under the following five headings, which reveal both the richness and the interconnectedness of Nick Clements' research agenda:

- Feature Theory / Théorie des traits
- Inventory structure / Structure des inventaires
- Phonetic bases of distinctive features / Bases phonétiques des traits distinctifs
- Phonological geography / géographie phonologique
- African language structures / structures linguistiques des langues africaines

http://nickclements.free.fr/index.html

On June 18-19, 2009, a number of Nick's colleagues and friends assembled at a "Tones and Features" symposium organized in his honor by John Goldsmith, Beth Hume and Leo Wetzels. At this symposium Nick's last conference presentation was a joint paper with his younger colleagues, Alexis Michaud and Cédric Patin, entitled "Do we need tone features?" It was a wonderful and meaningful event, both intellectually and in personal terms. We had no idea that Nick was so close to the end.

From the above I hope it is clear to readers of *Linguistic Typology* how important G. Nick Clements was to linguistics and to typology. While I have naturally dwelled on Nick's extraordinary contributions to the field, one must also mention Nick's character and great warmth as a person. As the remembrances on the following website further attest,

http://lpp.univ-paris3.fr/equipe/nick_clements/remembering-nick-clements.html

Nick was universally appreciated for his human qualities as well as his intellect. He was a generous and modest scholar. Although he visibly enjoyed sharing his own ideas, he was widely appreciated for his great capacity to listen to those of others, especially his students (with whom he frequently co-authored). In public forums and in print, he was always respectful of others and tried to seek common ground with colleagues with whom he disagreed (cf. Clements 1992a).

Finally, it should be noted that Nick was a multifaceted, talented person who arrived at linguistics in a roundabout way: Before receiving his PhD in linguistics, he had graduated Magma cum Laude with a bachelor's degree in fine arts from Yale University, after which he worked as a classical music announcer for a year in Nashville. After being stationed for two years in the US army in Germany, Nick lived in Spain where he painted, studied art, and wrote

for an English language periodical. It was in Paris that he got into linguistics, receiving a certificat from the Centre de Linguistique Quantitative, Faculté des Sciences, Université de Paris. He then taught from 1971 to 1973 as an adjunct professor of American English at the University of Paris 8. After completing his dissertation at SOAS in 1973, he was a visiting scholar at M.I.T., then taught successively at Harvard University (1975-1982) and Cornell University (1982-1991) before assuming his Directeur de Recherche position in the C.N.R.S. in 1992. In Paris Nick added to the attractions of the Laboratoire de Phonétique et Phonologie on the Rue des Bernardins where his linguistics colleagues and friends were lucky to be able to share the last 17 years of his career and life with him and his wonderful family, Annie, William and Celia. The above website already documents how so many of us feel about the great loss to us personally and to the field. Happily he has left much of great quality to keep us remembering for many years. As I wrote in my remembrance on the website, Nick was a prince among linguists.

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http://nickclements.free.fr/completepublications.html

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